

**CISTERN HEADS**

(Castillo De San Christobal, Cistern Heads)  
San Juan National Historic Site  
Boulevard Norzagaray  
San Juan  
San Juan  
Puerto Rico

**HABS NO. PR-102**

HABS  
PR  
7-SAJU,  
46-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Address: Within San Juan National Historic Site  
P.O. Box 712, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Located on the northwest side of El Caballero Bastion, the top level of Castillo de San Cristobal, the fortification that protected the land approach to the walled city of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Present Owner and Occupant: U. S. Government Property, administered by the National Park Service

Present Use: Interpretive exhibit - unlabeled

Statement of Significance: A good example of 18th Century cut stonework and detailing.

### PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owner: Built by the Spanish Army Engineers as part of the late eighteenth century expansion of the 17th Century Fort of San Cristobal. It remained Spanish Army property until the Spanish-American War of 1898 when it became U. S. Government property, administered by the U. S. Army.

February 14, 1949, the fortifications of San Juan were created a National Historic Site by presidential proclamation, but San Cristobal remained under the administration of the U. S. Army until 1961 when most of San Cristobal, including the section where the cistern heads are located, was transferred to the present administration of the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior. Since then, it has been operated as an active unit of San Juan National Historic Site.

2. Date of Erection: 1766-69
3. Notes on Original Plan and Construction: As part of a larger construction project, the Caballero Bastion of the 17 century was expanded to the North and South and increased in height between 1766 and early 1769. The cisternheads came into being probably during the later dates of this construction phase. The work was planned by the Chief Military Engineer, Thomas O'Daly, and carried out under his direction. He was assisted by the engineers Juan Francisco Mestres and Antonio Danon and master architect Antonio Sein, and the design of the cisternheads can presumably be accredited to one of the four.
4. Notes on known alternations and additions: No record has been preserved of any hoisting mechanism above well shaft and the existing masonry shows no discernible trace of its existence.

Except for weathering, both cisternheads stand presumably as designed.

In the 1940's, the shaft was blocked by a thin concrete slab at level of original lid to shaft.

B Historical Events and Persons Associated with Building

See paragraph 3 of A

C SOURCES of Information

Unpublished - Construction History of San Cristobal, 1634-1800, June 1965, by Richardo Torres Reyes, Historian, San Juan National Historic Site.

Microfilm collection of Maps and Drawings - San Juan National Historic Site - O'Daly Maps of 1765-69-72 & 74 -- originals all in Archivo de Indias, Seville, Spain.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL DATA

- A General Statement: A well-preserved example of a modestly formed treatment of a utilitarian object showing the stylistic preferences of their period.

- C Description: The two cisternheads are placed above the north and south end of the cistern that is built into the supporting masonry of the Caballero Bastion. The cisternheads are identical in shape, octagonal in plan, around a circular shaft, with a base moulding and a slightly projecting crown moulding. The mouldings are simple, but bold, and the execution of the cutting is excellent. The original slightly striated finish of the sandstone material can only be observed in areas that have had some protection from the weather. The cisternheads in their new state probably had a sharp, precise and closely defined appearance that in the present weathered condition has been lost. Part of their interest lies in the fact that they appear to be of the identical design as the cisternheads, now lost, that at one time were part of the design of the Officers' quarters on the Plaza de Armas of San Cristobal.

Frederick C. Gjessing

FCG/sam